

Carpe Diem—Meridian

ACHIEVING ACADEMIC PROGRESS THROUGH DIGITAL AND
IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION WINTER 2014



INDIANA CHARTER
SCHOOL BOARD



FACT FILE

Carpe Diem-Meridian

- Part of a network of five charter schools either open or planned; tentative plans call for a second Indianapolis school in fall 2015
- Meridian campus opened in Indianapolis in 2012–13
- Serves grades 6–12
- Has 5 teachers and about 180 students in 2013–14, of whom about 70 percent are African-American or mixed race, 25 percent are special-education students, and 63 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch
- Results furnished by the school:
 - In its first year, from September 2012 to May 2013, Carpe Diem-Meridian students achieved an average of three instructional years of growth in English language arts and science, and four years in math, according to Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) results
 - On the Indiana state test (ISTEP+), the spring 2013 results showed an overall pass rate of 76.5 percent in English language arts and 82.5 percent in math, surpassing Indianapolis Public Schools' averages by approximately 15 points in each subject.
 - Carpe Diem-Meridian high-schoolers also earned high pass rates on Indiana's subject matter end-of-course assessments (given the small number of students taking the exams, the school cannot publicly release the exact results).

SUMMARY

Carpe Diem, a growing network of five charter schools, began using its “personalized learning” model—blending individualized work online with social, collaborative learning in teacher-led workshops—in Yuma, Arizona, in 2006, with a Yuma school serving seventh through twelfth grades. That school has outperformed all county schools on state assessments from 2010–13, and has led the state in student growth in Arizona from 2011–13.

As he contemplated where to expand, founder Rick Ogston found Indianapolis to be a dynamic location for charter schools after state and local leaders encouraged Carpe Diem to consider opening a school there. Ogston saw an opportunity to improve his Yuma model by beginning the school with a newer online platform.

“Indianapolis has developed a reputation over the last several years as a place trying new things,” says Jason Bearce, Carpe Diem Indiana board chairman. “When Carpe Diem was looking at other states to expand to, Indiana bubbled to the surface as a place not satisfied with the status quo, particularly in Indianapolis, with organizations like The Mind Trust trying to recruit new talent in terms of teachers, leaders, and innovative models.”

Granted a charter by the Indiana Charter School Board in 2012, Ogston hired Mark Forner as his new school's leader, with lead teacher Josh Woodward hired shortly thereafter—both Teach For America alumni who taught in Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS).

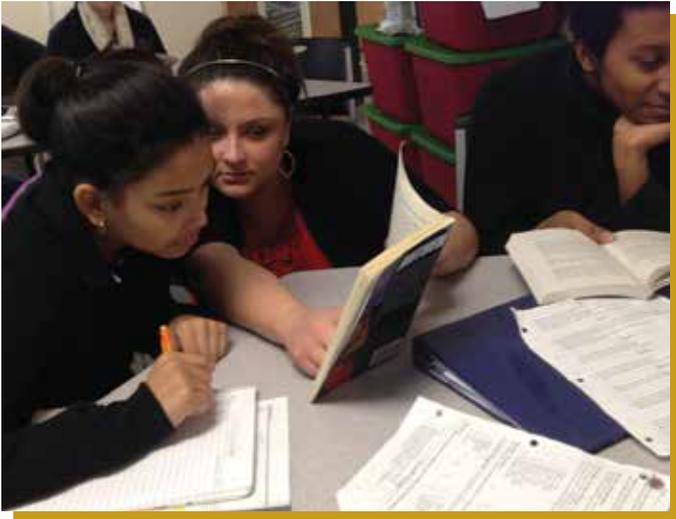
The two wanted to start their own charter school—a “one-room schoolhouse for the 21st century,” Forner says.

Opened in September 2012 on Meridian Street near downtown Indianapolis, Carpe Diem-Meridian combines a half-day of digital learning with teacher-led “workshops.”

Under a staff of five teachers, the students in the school's first year achieved an average of three instructional years of growth in English language arts and science, and four years in math, according to Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) results furnished by the school (see “Fact File”).

STUDENTS IN CARPE DIEM-MERIDIAN'S FIRST YEAR

Carpe Diem-Meridian (henceforth referred to as “Carpe Diem”) did not have a completely smooth entrance into Indianapolis, where it enrolled only 87 students of its goal of 120. At capacity, it can enroll 300 sixth- through twelfth-graders.



Daily workshops provide time for individual student attention as well as group lessons on state standards.

School leaders struggled to help Indianapolis families comprehend their model: a portion of each student's day spent learning online in a large "learning center" holding 300 cubicles, and a portion of the day in "workshops" with in-person teachers focused on higher-order thinking skills, high-priority or challenging topics, small-group discussions, and projects.

"In education circles, [the Carpe Diem network is] fairly well-known," Forner says. "Here, they didn't know us over on the next block. People thought we were a medical building. . . . It was a leap of faith for a lot of our parents."

"In terms of a logistical challenge, literally the building was being built up nearly until the day classes opened," Bearce says. "It was very difficult for people to envision what it was going to be, and there was some skepticism about whether it was going to exist at all."

The school also does not provide all the services of a traditional public school, such as buses, a cafeteria, or athletics—a challenge, Forner says, that led to a loss of about 20 percent of its original students. New enrollees made up that loss during the year, though, and the school nearly doubled its enrollment in its second year.

Students came to Carpe Diem from other charter schools after having disciplinary or academic issues, from traditional public schools, and from the suburbs. About 15 percent of Carpe Diem's students had been home-schooled; their parents wanted the socialization a school offers, Forner says.

During that first year, he says, the school "had more people running away from bad situations . . . our goal moving forward is to have people select us."

"This isn't a school of last resort for students," Bearce says. "This is a school for students who want to take their learning seriously, who want to demonstrate that they're willing to work hard, and rise to the level they're willing to aspire to. At the same time, students come in with the assumption that it's going to be easy. They quickly realize that this is serious business."

Carpe Diem should attract parents looking for a high-quality school with small class sizes, a safe place for special-education students, and a sense of community across the middle and high school grades, Forner says.

"You won't find a parent anywhere who doesn't like small . . . small classrooms, small school," he says. "Their kids are not going to get lost. They're going to get more attention."

Additionally, 25 percent of the students qualify for special education. "We have a high population of special-education kids. It's a big part of who we are. They're not shuffled off in some room. There's no social stigma. There's a huge respect for differences."

Carpe Diem focuses on getting its students college- and career-ready. The school is "not necessarily just academically based—

THE INDIANA CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD AND CARPE DIEM-MERIDIAN

The Indiana Charter School Board (ICSB), which emphasized a need for innovative school models in its call for charter school proposals, has been "fair, transparent, and open," says Jason Bearce, chairman of the Carpe Diem Indiana board of directors.

"They've also held us to a fair, and high, expectation," Bearce says. "When we talked about the idea of potentially scaling sooner than next year, they were open and supportive of that idea, but, like us as a board, wanted to have some strong safeguards in place. . . .

"They're asking hard questions, when necessary, but asking the right questions, and making sure that Carpe Diem lives up to the promise that we know it can live up to."

not every kid has decided to go to college. But we want to prepare them with marketable skills when they leave here,” Forner says.

Students interviewed at Carpe Diem liked the interactions between middle and high school students, made possible by the small size and the ability of students in Carpe Diem’s model to advance to higher levels based on content mastery, rather than traditional calendars and grade levels.

“We really stress the concept of being smart,” Forner says. “Smart is cool. It’s safe to act smart here.”

Social studies teacher Alyssa Starinsky agrees. “I haven’t seen an entire school where the culture is ‘to be smart is to be cool.’ ”

DIGITAL LEARNING AT CARPE DIEM-MERIDIAN

On the second floor of Carpe Diem’s building, the large, open learning center holds 300 cubicles, each equipped with a desk-top computer and headphones. Students participate in a morning meeting every day before going to their assigned middle or high school cubicles. If they prefer not to work there, students may request the privilege of working on their personal laptops elsewhere in the school. (Carpe Diem also grants students who are meeting the school’s expectations the privilege of using their own phones or other personal devices.)

Visitors to the space notice a low level of noise in the learning center, because students may talk to and help one another as they work. Two lab coaches monitor students’ progress on tablets as they walk through the room.

A special-education coordinator also has a room next to the learning center, where special-education students can work if they need a quieter space.

Time spent online varies throughout the week, with a longer stretch on Mondays—five hours for middle school and six for high school—while teachers meet individually with students, and just two and a half hours on Fridays. During the rest of the week, students spend about four and a half hours daily in the learning center.

Using the online Edgenuity curriculum, which aligns to Common Core and state standards, Carpe Diem students work at their own pace on what those interviewed agree is very challenging work.

“Until I started working on Edgenuity, I hadn’t realized how much I didn’t know!” says Julia, a sixth-grader.

Edgenuity courses follow the same routine:

- Students watch a video of a lecturer, accompanied by graphics, and take notes on the screen as they go, rewinding and pausing as needed.
- An interactive activity on the material follows, in which students will, for example, do a virtual science lab, or look

at an Internet research site and answer questions based on that site.

- A quiz then assesses whether a student mastered that content; students must score at least 80 percent to show mastery. If a student scores below 80, the curriculum locks, requiring a lab coach to reset the quiz after reviewing the student’s notes and understanding of the concept. Failing the quiz twice triggers a review with a teacher, or with a coach if a teacher is not available. Should a student fail a third time, a teacher will decide whether to do further review and another retest, or move the student ahead with the highest score received and a plan to revisit this concept later.

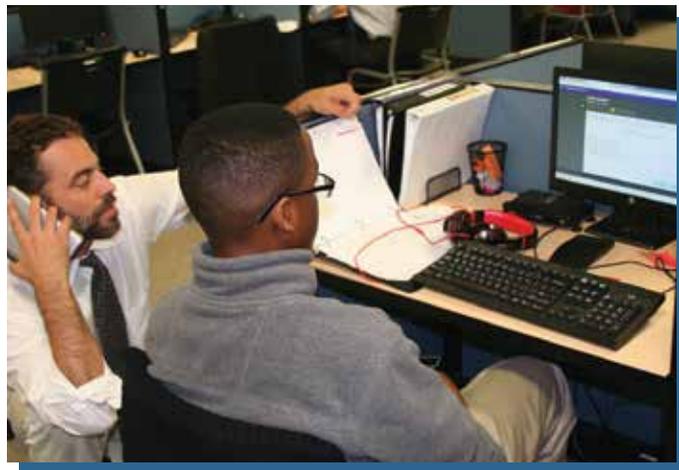
Students may also ask for help at any time from the two coaches. They simply raise their hands for help—“consider me triage,” says coach Scott Satterthwaite—or submit “coach assistance tickets” with questions to coaches, which appear on coaches’ tablets through free “Spiceworks” software.

On these data dashboards, coaches can see what, when, and for how long each student is working on a course, and get alerts when students appear stuck in a lesson. The course manager pulls course completion data midday and at the end of the day for school leaders to review and report in the following morning’s meeting.

If coaches can’t help, students may go to office hours of the teacher responsible for that subject throughout the day.

Students say they generally get help at least once or twice a day from a coach; one student reported asking for and receiving help much more often.

“Students always get help daily,” Satterthwaite says. “None are missed. They can get support from coaches in [the learning center], or from expert teachers.”



Lab coaches monitor student progress on tablets and offer assistance when students request it electronically.

Keeping Students Engaged

Although students work at their own pace, the curriculum requires a minimum: Students must complete about 1 percent of the curriculum each day, in each course, to stay on track—with their progress visible to them online.

“The challenge of beating the meter is fun,” says seventh-grader Maya.

Carpe Diem uses several incentives to keep students maintaining at least the minimum pace:

- At every morning meeting, school staff members honor the “top 10,” calling out the previous day’s top 10 students—those who completed the most lessons and demonstrated mastery. “Sometimes I do a lot just to say I can do more than someone else,” says Kamella, a 10th-grader.
- Staff members also quietly take note of the “struggling students.” The school adds together the percentages of progress a student made in each course, every day, to get a daily progress number. Students proceeding at just half the desired rate are told to report to a staff member after the meeting, and they lose access to their cell phones or other devices for the day, to help them stay focused on their online schoolwork. “The top and bottom 10 puts pressure on you, but it’s not a surprise because you always know where you’re at,” Maya says.
- Students who are on pace in three of their four core courses, with grades of at least an 80 in each of the three courses, may be dismissed at 2:30 p.m.; from 2:30 until 4 p.m., they can take part in extracurricular student groups, such as Students in Action, a community service group, and robotics. Students who are behind in their digital courses must stay until 4 p.m. to continue working online and come to school on Saturdays, when staff members volunteer to come in.
- High-schoolers who are on track to meet graduation requirements can also take electives online, spend more time on independent/group projects, and get college credit for advanced courses, including getting dual credit for college-level courses through a local technical college. The school requires several electives, including personal finance, career planning, and applied problem-solving; more than 75 online electives include foreign languages at many levels, psychology, art history, and computer science.

“If you’re willing to accept more responsibility, you get more freedom,” Forner says.



Lead teacher Josh Woodward guides students through a math workshop.

How the Digital Learning Model Helps Students

Forner and his staff see three main benefits to digital learning:

Personalization: Students work through the curriculum at their own pace. “Grade-level cohorts don’t exist here,” Forner says. “Our students include really high kids who can just fly, and love the idea of moving at their own pace. They don’t have to deal with the tyranny of their cohort. They don’t have to sit and wait for the lowest-performing student. On the other end, we have students who need extra time, who grind a little slower. They get that here with us.”

Students do, however, meet by grade level in workshops, to be sure they have covered the state standards and benchmarks set by grade level.

“There’s a tendency to make Carpe Diem about technology, but it’s actually a fundamental rethinking of how a classroom operates,” Bearce says. “Let the technology do what it’s good at, but let the teachers do what they’re best at.” The model does not aim to replace teachers with technology, Carpe Diem founder Rick Ogston notes, but instead to rethink the best uses of teachers’ time and talents, assisted by technology.

Giving students power over their education: “We hold students accountable to their goals, but at the end of the day, it’s their personalized education,” Forner says. “To be successful here, the students have to be able to work independently, and manage their freedom.”

Carpe Diem helps its students, especially younger ones, develop that skill over time, with coaches and teachers redirecting younger students more often.

Students also help one another through a mentoring program in which older students work with younger ones on digital curriculum. Students say this helps to build relationships across grade levels and ages.

They also like having a say in where they work online; students may, for example, ask to work on a laptop in a teacher's classroom.

Constant monitoring of data by students, teachers, coaches, and parents: Everyone can see how students are progressing.

- Teachers meet with individual students every Monday to set weekly goals for digital learning and in-person workshops based on student-learning data, which include quizzes for all online lessons.
- Teachers meet every morning to discuss student data. "One of the agenda items is always a student," Forner says. "The entire staff gets to focus on one student together to think through how to help him."
- Coaches monitor students in real time in the learning center and intervene when needed.
- Teachers get reports midday and at the end of the day showing student progress on online courses, and intervene with students during their office hours.
- Students see their individual dashboards showing their progress on curriculum for each course and the percent mastered for each lesson.
- Parents may log in to Engrade, a grade-tracking program, to check student progress in Edgenuity and workshops.

Student and teacher success is measured through the state standardized assessments, NWEA assessments, and completion and mastery of the online curriculum. The NWEA data carry the most weight.

Thrice-yearly NWEA assessments monitor student growth, although Carpe Diem acknowledges their limitations. "Upper-level students that score off the charts on the NWEA don't take it again," Forner says. "It works much better for younger or lower students."

The school also conducts two simulated exams during the year to prepare students for the state ISTEP+ exam. But Forner says Carpe Diem does not stress test preparation. "If we do the things we're supposed to do as educators, those things will take care of themselves."

Digital learning does present some challenges, however.

- Mandatory test dates become problematic because Carpe Diem's flexible schedule allows students to master material much earlier or later. For example, a student might finish all course material in December but need to wait until the end of the school year to take the ISTEP+.



Workshops allow time for science students to participate in traditional lab work.

- Keeping students engaged when the routine does not vary—watch a lecture, take notes, take a quiz—remains an issue. Students called the curriculum "dull" because of the unvarying structure.

IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION IN CARPE DIEM-MERIDIAN'S MODEL

Throughout the day, Carpe Diem's five teachers lead workshops; students attend two or three of these per day, working in the learning center in between workshops.

Carpe Diem's five classroom teachers each focus on one subject, instructing all grades in that subject—English, math, science, social studies, and health and wellness.

"When you're teaching so many grades, it's very cool, because when sixth grade is one half of the hemisphere and seventh is the other half, I can see their knowledge," social studies teacher Starinsky says. "I know what their teacher taught them last year because it was me. I'm confident they'll go into the next grade knowing a lot."

The workshops, on the first floor of the school, are held in classrooms with large windows facing a center hallway (called the "fish-bowl"). Teachers can decide how long each should last, though they rarely end early; generally they run from 40 to 60 minutes—an amount that students called "perfect."

Workshop class sizes vary, ranging from four to about 25 students; most have 12 to 18 students. Sixth- and seventh-graders are in single-sex classes.

In the workshops, Forner says, gifted teachers should guide students in practical applications of what they learned online,

through a focus on higher-order thinking skills, high-priority or difficult topics, small-group discussions, and projects.

“The kids still get through the entire textbook online,” lead teacher Josh Woodward says. “But as teachers, we get to prioritize what we teach in the workshops, what we go deep into. They still need to see some of that digital curriculum content from me.”

And, Bearce says, “Carpe Diem also contextualizes the learning, and connects what students are learning in the classroom to what they want to do once they graduate from high school.”

“You get a lot of real-world examples,” ninth-grader Sydney says. “You start to see things in life to apply the knowledge.”

The workshops do not necessarily track with what students are learning online at that time; teachers have autonomy over how they spend workshop time that allows them to cover standards and benchmarks that meet all students’ needs regardless of where they are in digital curriculum.

In his middle school math classes, Woodward covers one skill every two weeks; in high school (such as geometry and trigonometry), he spends three to four weeks teaching the state standards, then the same amount of time on a project to apply those skills.

“Last year, my workshops were all based on the question, ‘What do I wish I would have learned in my math class?’ We did a lot of experiments, projects, and things they could utilize in the real world.”

Typical workshops have included:

- In an English workshop, 10th-graders studied *To Kill a Mockingbird*, meeting in small groups to read it aloud and discuss.
- In a sixth-grade boys’ social studies class, the teacher led a guided practice on how to take notes by watching a rap video about current events, pausing to discuss the song’s content and pulling out the main topics and subtopics to write down.
- In a sixth-grade girls’ science class, students drafted lab reports taking them through the scientific method, based on an experiment they did on taste preferences of different types of sodas, including one they made themselves in class. The students worked in groups to analyze collected data, and used Excel on laptops to graph their data.
- In a high school pre-calculus class, students studied personal finance, learning about stocks and bonds and investing appropriately for their needs. Students read aloud a unit on the different terms, then watched a video and took a quiz online. Finally, they searched online for promising stocks and bonds.

Students can also get in-person instruction through visiting a teacher during office hours, including during a 30-minute midday block or after school from 2:30 to 4 p.m. Students can drop in or set an appointment for help with workshop or online content. Teachers may also use this time to pull students from the learning center for intervention.

STAFFING MODEL AT CARPE DIEM-MERIDIAN 2013–14

Carpe Diem strives to maintain a small staff. In 2013–14, it has:

- A principal, who serves as chief academic officer
- A dean of students, who oversees career preparation and training, acts as “college transition specialist,” and is head of discipline
- A receptionist/registrar
- 1 staff member for technology support
- 5 core subject teachers
- 1 special-education coordinator
- 2 half-time paraprofessionals who support the special-education population
- 2 coaches

That small staff allows the school to hire all of its core subject teachers into positions that pay more than the average IPS salary for 10th-year teachers with a bachelor’s degree. Lab coaches, graduates of Marian University in Indianapolis who are certified to teach and aspire to become teachers, receive paraprofessional-level salaries. They also have some flexibility in their schedules, such as the opportunity to leave before the end of the school day.

The school also saves money by not providing such services as transportation, lunch, and sports, and it outsources accounting and maintenance needs.

Carpe Diem will keep its current staffing size of five core teachers when it reaches its 300-student capacity, with four coaches and an additional special-education teacher as needed. That small staff allows it to be very selective in hiring; in its initial hiring, Carpe Diem looked for teachers with at least three to four years of classroom experience, a record of high academic expectations, and strong student achievement results.

Carpe Diem teachers must know their subjects deeply to teach students across grades and learning levels, Ogston says. Because teacher-led workshops are where social, collaborative learning occurs, teachers need to make the subject accessible and engaging. They also must have strong work ethics and possess such skills as:

- The ability to build strong student relationships.
- Strong classroom management skills: “Classroom management should be a complete non-issue,” Woodward says.

- Solid planning abilities, given the range of grades and courses taught.
- Flexibility: “You have to be not scared of a new model, not scared of change,” Forner says. “I need people to deal with the ambiguity of starting a new school and new model.”
- A commitment to put in extra time and work. “I work harder, but I work harder because I see the results. At previous schools, I felt like an island when I worked incredibly hard,” Starinsky says. “I would say, this year, I spend the same amount of time planning as at my previous school. Last year [Carpe Diem’s first year], it was at least another four hours a week.”
- The ability to work independently. Forner is part of the team, but gives teachers space to solve issues and challenges they identify.



Teachers have one-on-one meeting time with each student, each week.

Carpe Diem provides some support for its teachers in those skills, with professional development that begins with summer training sessions with Ogston and at least several days of train-

A DAY IN THE LIFE: A CARPE DIEM TEACHER’S TYPICAL DAY

Every morning, teachers gather at the morning meeting, to recognize students who are meeting goals (by calling out their names and posting them on classroom windows).

Mondays are different from the rest of the week: Teachers hold five-minute meetings with each student to discuss progress and set goals for online and workshop work.

The following schedule shows Tuesday/Thursday math workshops; other workshops would be taught on Wednesday and Friday.

7:30–8 A.M.	All staff meet to discuss the previous day’s student data
8–8:10 A.M.	All-school morning meeting
8:10–8:50 A.M.	Teacher planning time (students work online), but math teacher leads a geometry workshop
8:50–9:30 A.M.	Algebra I workshop
9:30–10:10 A.M.	Another algebra I workshop
10:10–10:20 A.M.	Break/student assistance time
10:20–11:30 A.M.	Eighth-grade math workshop
11:30–NOON	Office hours; students come in for help or are pulled from the learning center for intervention*
NOON–12:30 P.M.	Lunch; students eat in the classroom with the lead teacher
12:30–1:30 P.M.	Sixth-grade math workshop
1:30–2:30 P.M.	Seventh-grade math workshop
2:30–4 p.m.	Follow-up with students needing intervention

*Teachers may have other office hour times as well

ing from curriculum provider Edgenuity on new features and a review of old ones.

Teachers also spend a week at school covering the school culture and norms, and NWEA assessments.

During the school year, Forner says, teachers get professional development and collaboration through daily morning meetings for 20 minutes (40 minutes on Fridays).

Carpe Diem's Opportunities for Teachers

Carpe Diem uses the promise of autonomy, professionalism, the opportunity to reach many more students, and higher pay to recruit and retain top teachers. Teachers appreciate working with other top teachers with a unified sense of purpose, and the chance to reach 300 students with their teaching, Forner says.

"Last year, all the teachers were TFA [Teach For America] alums. We all shared that passion for kids and educational equity."

Autonomy: Forner says having a small leadership team is critical here; he wants teachers to worry only about teaching, and spend all their time in the classroom and focused on students, with no other responsibilities.

"What if I paid you \$50k, [and said] you can work with an all-star team of other fellow TFA alums who share your mindset, in a small environment, for a wonderful building principal who will spend all his time running interference for you? Invariably, I was able to get five that said yes."

Teachers get a strong say in changing the instructional model and schedules as needed. They choose what to focus on in workshops, without being bound to any curriculum.

"We're unique in that we're so small, and so quick to respond to student needs," Forner says. "We can make fairly major changes quickly, and be dynamic in responding to kids' needs."

Starinsky appreciates that autonomy: "One of the most powerful tools is just the confidence that [Forner] has in each of us as professionals. If I say I have this cool idea, but it's not going to look normal, he'll say go for it. That confidence that's instilled in us has allowed us to flourish as a teacher and as an academic reference. I feel like a professor."

Professionalism: Teachers like the professionalization of teaching at Carpe Diem. "We're paid more. We're a shirt-and-tie environment. We work more like a college [from the students' perspective]. We have office hours. I can go from teaching sixth-grade math to teaching pre-calculus. Every day is different," Josh Woodward says. "No way would I be teaching still if I were in a traditional school."

"Josh really wants to professionalize the teaching profession," Forner says. "He really wants to change the profession, push the idea of exclusivity."

CREATING AN OPPORTUNITY CULTURE

In Public Impact's Opportunity Culture initiative, schools use job redesign and age-appropriate technology to extend the reach of excellent teachers and their teams, to more students, for more pay, within budget.

Opportunity Culture schools follow the five "**Opportunity Culture Principles.**" How does Carpe Diem measure up against those principles?

Teams of teachers and school leaders must choose and tailor models to:

1. Reach more students with excellent teachers:

With just five core teachers, school leaders can be very selective in hiring, and at capacity will reach all 300 students with the best teacher they can hire in each subject.

2. Pay teachers more for extending their reach:

Carpe Diem pays its teachers more than they would earn in surrounding schools.

3. Fund pay within regular budgets: At capacity, the school will be sustainable within regular funding, made easier by its use of blended learning, which allows the smaller staff.

4. Provide protected in-school time and clarity about how to use it for planning, collaboration, and development: Time for planning and collaboration is built into the daily schedule, and the informal lead teacher role provides an opportunity to develop other teachers.

5. Match authority and accountability to each person's responsibilities: One teacher is accountable for each core subject. The role of lead teacher is informal, with no extra pay or accountability.

For more on Public Impact's Opportunity Culture initiative, please visit OpportunityCulture.org.

Higher pay: “It’s an all-star group, and they’re paid above-market wages,” Forner says. “You just hope that if you throw enough money at them, they’ll stay.”

Teacher leadership: The designation of “lead teacher” for Woodward, Ogston says, is not a formalized role. Rather, Woodward has been able to define his own role, taking on tasks where he has strong abilities as part of the leadership team. Among the tasks he has taken on:

- Planning and participating in professional development at the beginning of the school year
- Refining the online curriculum for all subjects
- Creating schedules for the whole school
- Customizing Edgenuity tools and others for teachers to collect and analyze data
- Personalizing digital courses with input from teachers/staff, and acting as the curriculum liaison between the school and Edgenuity
- Creating weekly student goal sheets
- Maintaining course structure sequencing
- Placing students in courses based on their data
- Developing and delivering the daily morning report on the previous day’s top and bottom 10 students
- Attending every Saturday school

“Josh is the Excel guru. . . . He’ll find something that works for him, and it’ll become a school procedure because it’s best for my students,” Starinsky says.

“Josh is unique because our staff holds him in such high regard with regard to his abilities in the classroom,” Forner says. “Our school has taken on a lot of Josh’s personality, and his high expectations for kids.”

Other leadership roles for teachers have not been developed.

Key Staff Challenges Under Carpe Diem’s Model

Heavy workloads: Carpe Diem leaders say a major challenge comes in the much heavier workload teachers have than in a traditional setting. At capacity, teachers will have to track all students’ online progress while teaching a full load of classes for 300 students.

Some subjects require many, very different workshops. Woodward, for example, offers eight math courses including pre-calculus and trigonometry, meaning he teaches workshops during his break/prep time.

“I’m responsible for planning and teaching eight different classes, but I enjoy it because I can get creative with it, and I’m familiar with the content,” he says. “It’s incredibly challenging, but I love that. This school is not for every teacher.”

All the teachers are working harder, Forner says, but feeling more effective than in previous schools.

“My approach to keep teachers despite the workload is [that] I have close relationships with my teachers. They’re extremely loyal. They all have TFA backgrounds. We’re all renegades. And we have an opportunity to change the world for 180 students.”



Lead teacher Josh Woodward talks to all students during a morning meeting, which kicks off every school day.

Forner does try to force some balance in his teachers' lives, making them leave the building at 4 p.m.

However, Woodward said, the reality is that he still brings work home with him.

"I try to get people to work smarter, not longer," Forner says. "You have to manage your energy through the school year . . . Josh says he can prepare for the week in four hours—it used to be eight. We're working with staff members to get them there, too."

REACHING FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Because the blended-learning model requires fewer classroom teachers, it can reach economies of scale faster; additionally, Carpe Diem keeps supplemental school staff to a minimum, Bearce says.

"Our school is primarily focused on learning—what elements of school are needed to maximize this learning experience? We're just operating at a different level and in a different amount of space; there are a lot of opportunities to economize."

However, the school needed start-up funding, and its early under-enrollment set it back.

"We started slowly, behind the 8-ball. In the first year, the school wasn't a physical presence in the community for a long enough time that we started more slowly than originally anticipated," Bearce says. "In a funny way, it worked to our advantage—it gave us time to get the right teachers and administration in place, and get the curriculum tight. But there was a negative financial impact to that. We've been playing catch-up ever since."

As Carpe Diem overall scales up, the shorter-term challenges of raising capital to open a building should ease, he says.

EXPANDING CARPE DIEM IN INDIANA

Given the student results from the first year, Bearce says, Carpe Diem Indiana feels positive about its future.



Students designated as "All-Stars" for meeting their individual goals the previous week get to sign their names on a school window.

"We feel very good that the model is sound, the curriculum is sound, and the learning is sound. We're well-positioned to be scaled elsewhere," he says.

But the board wants to ensure that whatever communities it enters with its remaining charters show strong interest in their model.

"We want to make sure any place we go will have sustained engagement and interest from the community. We don't want to go in and be there one day, and not be there a couple of years later," he says. "We want to be cautious and deliberate about any place we expand to, make sure it's a sustainable expansion, make sure the learning hits a very high standard, and make sure there's a demonstrated need and demand from students and families."

LEARN MORE ABOUT CARPE DIEM-MERIDIAN

Carpe Diem

Carpe Diem-Meridian

News reports on Carpe Diem:

<http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/personalized-learning/>

<https://stateimpact.npr.org/indiana/2012/09/06/how-indiana-schools-are-blurring-the-lines-between-computer-classroom/>

<http://www.csdcc.org/getting-results/featured-projects/carpe-diem-collegiate-high-school.aspx>

<http://asq.org/qualitynews/qnt/execute/displaySetup?newsID=17120>

<http://praiseindy.com/1870752/carpe-diem-first-charter-school-in-indy-chartered-by-state-of-indiana-updates-on-first-years-success/>

Acknowledgements

The Indiana Charter School Board commissioned this case study with the generous support of an implementation grant from The Fund for Authorizing Excellence. This case study was co-authored by Jiye Grace Han and Sharon Kebschull Barrett, with contributions from Joe Ableidinger, Rob Weldon, Bryan C. Hassel, and Emily Ayscue Hassel, all of Public Impact. Thank you to Beverley Tyndall for production of this report, and to April Leidig for its design. Public Impact also thanks Sarah McClamroch Sullivan and Emily Richardson of the Indiana Charter School Board for their assistance in working with Carpe Diem and for feedback on the case study draft, as well as the staff of Carpe Diem-Meridian, board chairman Jason Bearce, and founder Rick Ogston, for their assistance in helping to understand their model through site visits, interviews, and draft reviews.

© 2014 Indiana Charter School Board, Indianapolis, IN

© 2014 Public Impact, Chapel Hill, NC

The Indiana Charter School Board's mission is to authorize and hold accountable a portfolio of high-performing charter schools in which students achieve high levels of growth and graduate prepared for college and careers. Please visit www.in.gov/icsb for more information.

Public Impact's mission is to dramatically improve learning outcomes for all children in the U.S., with a special focus on students who are not served well. We are a team of professionals from many backgrounds, including former teachers. We are researchers, thought leaders, tool-builders, and on-the-ground consultants who work with leading education reformers. For more on Public Impact, please visit www.publicimpact.com.

Public Impact encourages the free use, reproduction, and distribution of this paper for noncommercial use. **We require attribution for all use.** For more information and instructions on the commercial use of our materials, please contact us at www.publicimpact.com.

Please cite this report as:

Han, J. G., & Barrett, S. K. (2014). *Carpe Diem—Meridian: Achieving academic progress through digital and in-person instruction*. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Charter School Board, and Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact. Retrieved from <http://www.in.gov/icsb/2448.htm>.